

DISCOURSE

Mr. Eyre's S E R M O N

Preach'd at the

ASSIZES

Held at

W I N C H E S T E R

April the 11th 1693.

Mhc8
1693
Ey6

Mr. Fyfe's SERMON

Imprimatur

May 10th 1693. **RA. BARKER.**

Held at

WINCHESTER

April the 11th 1693.

A
DISCOURSE
 Concerning the
 Nature and Satisfaction
 OF A
Good and Inoffensive CONSCIENCE.
 IN A
SERMON
 Preach'd in the
Cathedral Church
 OF
WINCHESTER,
 At the
ASSIZES
 Held there *April 11. 1693.*

By *Robert Eyre* A. M. Fellow of the College near *Winchester.*

LONDON: Printed for *B. Aylmer* at the *Three Pigeons*
 over against the *Royal Exchange* in *Cornhil.* 1693.

DISCOURS

Concerning the

Nature and Satisfaction

A 30

SEYMOUR

Copyright © 1993

50

WESTERN

541 2A

To the Right Worshipful
EDWARD HOOPER, Esq;
High Sheriff of the
County of SOUTHAMPTON.

S I R,

THE Importunity of Friends and the Command of Superiors, bath generally pass'd as an allow'd Apology for committing Discourses of this nature to the Press. You best know how much this is my present Case. And if this be not sufficient to excuse me to the World for Publishing a Sermon which gives so little Advantage to that excellent and most useful Subject about which it treats, you are one of those who must answer for it: for I have this to say for my self, that your particular Commands herein were too peremptory to be withstood; and the many endearing Obligations which you have
beaped

heaped upon me, have put me so much within your Power, that you left me no liberty to pursue my own Inclinations.

However, since you were resolv'd it should be so, I cannot but with some inward kind of Complacency lay hold on the Occasion, to publish to the World what a general Satisfaction you gave in the Administration of your Office; and how eminently you distinguished your Respect to those of my Gown more especially: which altho it was no more than what was suitable to the natural Generosity of your Temper, and to that known Civility wherewith you have always treated those of our Profession; yet so publick an Instance of it as this deserves no less than a publick Acknowledgment: And this you are humbly desired to accept of, in the behalf of all those whose Gratitude and Respect you have hereby engaged; and from the hands of one, who of all the rest is more particularly intituled to the Character of,

S I R,

Your most Obliged Humble Servant,

ROBERT ETRE.

ACTS xxiv. 16.

*Herein do I exercise my self, to have always
a Conscience void of Offence toward God
and toward Men.*

ALthough it may not be thought proper upon these Occasions for the Pulpit to usurp the Authority of the Bench, and for the Preacher instead of Expounding the Gospel, to Dictate Law to the Magistrate, (besides that this seems to fall under that Apostolical Censure whereby we are expressly forbid *Ἀλλοτρίοις νόμοις* to be Pragmatical or *Busie-Bodies in other Mens matters*) and although that known Learning and Integrity for which our Courts of Judicature are at this day so deservedly eminent, would render a Discourse of this nature altogether useless and unnecessary; yet I hope I shall not be thought to be wholly unmindful of the Circumstances and Occasion of our present Assembly, if I undertake at this time to Explain the Notion, and Direct the Conduct, and Recommend the Exercise of a Good Conscience: this being the Rule by which all Civil, as well as all Moral and Reli-

Religious Actions, ought to be directed ; and what therefore ought carefully to be observed, and endeavour'd after, by all Ranks and Orders of Men whatsoever.

The Words of the Text are part of that Defence which the Apostle *St. Paul* made for himself before *Felix* the *Roman* Governour of *Cæsarea* ; which although they were principally intended to justify his own Innocence, with reference to the Crimes alledged against him ; they were very Instructive likewise to influence the just and equitable Proceedings of the Court to which he appealed ; and a very proper Lesson to be learn'd and practis'd by those who were produced as Witnesses against him, or were any way concern'd in the Prosecution.

But abstracting from the Consideration of these or the like Historical Circumstances of the Text, which it were easie and obvious to observe to render it more particularly applicable to the Time, and Place, and Occasion of our present Assembly ; I shall apply my self directly to the Subject-matter of it in this following Method.

I. I will enquire what is to be understood by a *Good and Inoffensive Conscience*, or, when a Man may be truly and properly said to have it.

II. I will lay before your Consideration the Happiness and Satisfaction which ariseth from the Testimony of a *Good Conscience*.

III. And

III. And in the last Place briefly exhort you to endeavour after it.

First then, I am to enquire what is to be understood by a *Good and Inoffensive Conscience*, or, when a Man may be truly and properly said to have it.

There is no one Thing that hath been more unhappily mistaken and abused than this of Conscience; which being designed by Almighty God for the better Regulation of our Lives and Actions, and placed in our Souls both as a Guide to direct us in the Knowledge of our Duty, and also as a Monitor to quicken and encourage us in the performance of it; hath yet, through the unhappy Corruption of some Men, been profligated and abused to quite contrary Ends and Purposes; since there is hardly any one Doctrin or Practice amongst the many different Sects and Opinions of Men in Religion, how sinful and erroneous soever in its own nature, how fatal and damning soever in its consequence, which yet the rash and intemperate Zeal of a pretended Conscience hath not been brought to justify; the very same Doctrins and Practices which in some Men have been justly accused as impious and unwarrantable, having been excused in others as the Dictates of a tender and religious Conscience. We have heard with our Ears, and our Fathers have told us, what Heresies and Schisms in the Church, what Murders, Rapines, and Rebellions in the State, have

been sometimes maintained both in our own and neighbouring Nations, under the plausible Pretence of a *Good and Inoffensive Conscience*; yea, what Blasphemous and downright Atheistical Principles have been broach'd and avowed upon this very Account, and that not only amongst such as call themselves Christians, but even amongst Turks and Jews themselves; for 'tis to be noted, that they All equally pretend the same thing: and how different and contradictory soever they are in their several Hypotheses as to other matters; yet they All with one accord agree in this, That they have still acted according to the Dictates of their Consciences, and followed the Guidance of that Principle within them which they say was given them by God, and imprinted in their Souls on purpose to regulate and govern their Actions by.

For this Reason, before I proceed to the Enquiry proposed, it will be requisite that I should first clear my way to it, by explaining the Meaning, and fixing the Notion of this so equivocally ambiguous, and uncertain Word called Conscience.

Conscience then, in the most general and comprehensive Sense of the Word, is that Act of the Soul whereby a Man judgeth and reflecteth on the moral Good or Evil, the Lawfulness or Unlawfulness of his own Actions. Now a Man's Actions, as they are the Object of the Judgment, and Reflection

tion of his Conscience, do fall under this twofold Consideration: They are consider'd either as past and already done; or else as future and to be done. From which Variety of Circumstances in the Action, there ariseth a like Variety of Acts or Offices in the Conscience: For as the Conscience looks forward, and considers the Action to be done, it either encourageth or else discourageth the Man from doing it: And as it looks backward and reflects upon the Action past, it accuseth, condemneth, affrighteth and terrifieth the Sinner; but excuseth, commendeth, applaudeth, adds Joy, Peace and Satisfaction to the Good Man. In both which Cases the Notion of Conscience is still the same; however it may be variously denominated from the different Circumstances of the Object: For although in the one Case it be considered as a Guide to direct, and in the other as a Witness to testify; yet in both it is nothing else but a Man's Judgment or Persuasion concerning the Lawfulness or Unlawfulness, the Guilt or Innocence of his own Actions.

But now that in both these Cases the Conscience may be always able to judge and witness aright, without being left (as it too often happens) to the fallible and uncertain Guidance of Misunderstanding, Prejudice or Caprice; it hath a fixt and standing Rule given it, by which it self ought to be directed; and accordingly as it either agrees with,

or deviates from this Rule, the Action concerning which it witnesseth or judgeth, will be always known to be either Good or Evil; Lawful or Unlawful.

This Rule, in one Word, is nothing else but the Will of God, made known to us out of those divine Laws and Precepts which he hath at sundry Times and in divers Manners given to Men to walk by;

Whether those Laws are such as were at first written in the *Tables of our Hearts*, and are discoverable to us by the meer light of natural Knowledge; and this is properly the Rule of a Heathen's or Philosopher's Conscience.

Or such, secondly, as were revealed by God through the Ministration of *Moses* and the Prophets; which was the Rule of a Jew's Conscience.

Or such, lastly, as were more plainly and fully delivered to us Christians by our Blessed Saviour and his Apostles; and this, as it is comprehensive and perfective of both the former, is the only proper Rule of the Christian's Conscience; for herein is contained the whole Will of God; which forasmuch as it is the most perfect Rule of our Christian Duty and Obedience, is the Rule likewise which the Conscience is always to determine it self by. So that although in one of the Cases above mentioned, Conscience be given us as a Guide to direct us, yet
this

this is the Rule by which it self ought to be guided and directed: And although in the other Case, Conscience be given us as a Witness to acquit or condemn us; yet it cannot be properly said to do either the one or the other arbitrarily and of it self, but by comparing the Action for which it thus acquitteth or condemneth us, with its Conformity to, or Deviation from this Rule.

Thus for Instance, My Conscience tells me, that I must worship and serve God, and God only: And when I have done any thing contrary to the Obligation of this Duty, *i. e.* when I have either neglected those Means and Opportunities which God hath given me of frequenting the publick Worship of his Church; or on the other hand have rob'd him of his Glory, by transferring that Worship which was due to him only, to any inferiour Object, whether it be Saint or Angel, or any other Creature; when, I say, I have by these or any other ways transgressed my Duty herein, then is my Conscience ready to accuse and condemn me for it: The Reason of which is, because the Rule saith, *Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.* Thus likewise my Conscience tells me, that I must not do any thing to the Injury or Prejudice of my Neighbour: And when I have done any such thing, it witnesseth against me; and that because the Rule again saith, *Thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thy self,*

self. And so of all the particular Instances, as well of Negative as Affirmative Precept, both of the first and second Table.

From all which it clearly appears, what is to be understood by this Word Conscience, (*viz.*) that Act of the Soul whereby a Man judgeth concerning the Lawfulness or Unlawfulness of his own Actions, by comparing them with those divine Laws and Directions which are left to us in the Gospel, to be the standing, fix'd, and unalterable Rule of our Duty.

In what Case soever therefore the Pretence of Conscience is set up against the Authority of the Scriptures, or thwarts the Obligation of any one positive Law, that is either clearly contained therein, or may by good consequence be deduced therefrom, that Pretence is altogether vain and irrational, and wholly insufficient of it self to warrant or excuse any Action that shall be misguided by it.

But however this be allowed as a certain and unerring Rule for the Conscience to determine it self by, with reference to all those Actions which fall under the plain and express Direction of a Divine Law; yet the Question may still be put, How is the Conscience to behave it self with reference to those Actions which are of humane Cognizance only, and concerning which God Almighty hath no where express'd his revealed Will?

In

In Answer to which Enquiry, it will be sufficient to remark this in the general, That the Supreme Legislative Authority of any Nation (be the *Form of Government*, the particular Form and Modification what it will) is the Appointment and *Ordinance of God*; which he hath invested with the Power of making and enacting Laws; and to which Laws likewise (so far forth as they are not directly contrary to any other known Revelation of his divine Will) he hath positively enjoined the Obedience and Submission of every particular Subject. This therefore being granted, (which I think few of those who admit any such thing as Civil Government in the World at all, did ever pretend to deny) it will from hence follow, That the Rule above mentioned for the Conscience to determine it self by, must hold as well with reference to those Actions which are to be directed by our Municipal Laws, as with reference to those which fall under the plain and express Obligation of a divine Precept. For however (as some are wont to cavil in this Dispute) the Magistrate cannot indeed directly and *per se* oblige the Conscience to the Obedience of any Humane Law; yet certainly it will be allowed, That God can oblige the Conscience to obey the Magistrate: And if so, then it is as much the Will of God that we should do or not do what the Supreme Rightful Authority over us commandeth by a Law (provided that Law be

no ways sinful in it self) as if God had written it with his own Finger in *Tables of Stone*.

And this I chose to mention, for the better Information of those, who think themselves no farther obliged by any Municipal Law or Statute of the Land, than to obey it, or disobey it, at pleasure; provided that upon default of their Obedience they are always ready to submit to the Penalty annex'd to it: For although this be true in respect of all such Laws as are purely Penal; yet where the Law is directly Preceptive, and from whence it plainly appears, that the principal Intent of the Lawgiver was not so much to punish or mulct the Offender, as to prevent and restrain the Offence, there can be no room left for any such Evasion. Thus when the Law directs and requires the Contribution of the Subject for the Honour and Support of the Civil Government; or, when it positively enjoyns such and such particular Allotments for the maintenance of the Church; in either of these Cases, to defraud the King of his Customs, or the Parson of his Tithes (however these are look'd upon by some Men as Offences of a very venial nature) is as much a Transgression of the 8th Commandment, as the Contempt of that Authority by which those Laws were enacted is an open and profest Violation of the 5th.

And if there ariseth an Obligation upon the Conscience from those Laws which are seemingly Hu-
mane,

mane, and of a civil nature only; then certainly the Obligation must be thought to be much stronger with reference to all those Laws, in the Observance whereof, the Glory of God, as well as the Authority of the Civil Power, is more immediately concerned. Of which nature are all those Laws more especially which by the Piety and Wisdom of our Legislators have been severally made and enacted against Swearing and Cursing, against Drunkenness and *Profanation of the Lords-day*, &c. Concerning which I humbly crave leave to submit these two following Queries to the serious Consideration of those honorable Persons to whom the Execution of these Laws is more immediately committed; and who have solemnly engaged themselves by an Oath to see them executed according to the utmost of their Power. First, Whether or no, or how far, every Justice of the Peace is obliged in Conscience to inflict the Penalty of the Law upon every Person whom he himself hears Cursing or Swearing an Oath, or whom he himself sees Drunken or Profaning the Lord's-day? it being expressly provided by the Law in these cases, that (a) his own Hearing of the one, and (b) Seeing of the other, shall be as full a Conviction of the Offence, as if the Offender were brought before him, and there formally accused thereof by any two substantial Witnesses. Second-

(a) 21 Jac. 20.
3 Car. 4.
(b) 4 Jac. 5.
21 Jac. 7.
3 Car. 1. 1.

ly, Whether, if the respective Penalties were strictly exacted, according to the pious Intent of the Law in these Cases, it might not prove one very effectual means to prevent a great deal of that Blasphemy and Profaneness, that Riot and Intemperance, that Contempt and Neglect of Religious Worship, which is at this day so much the Scandal of our Christian Profession; and which, of all our other National Sins, seems to cry the loudest to Heaven for Vengeance upon us.

And now having premised thus much concerning the Notion of Conscience in the general, and fix'd the Rule by which it is to be directed; it will cost us no great difficulty to understand what is meant by a *Good and Inoffensive Conscience*. However, that I may give a more clear and distinct Account of it, I will consider it as I did before, under that twofold relation which it bears either to our past or future Actions, *i. e.* either as in the one case it is consider'd as a Guide to direct, or in the other as a Witness to testify concerning them.

In the former of these Relations, as the Conscience is considered as a Guide to direct, it may be then properly said to be *Good and Inoffensive*, when it guides and directs aright; when it puts no Scandal or Stumbling-block in our way, whereby we are betrayed into any Sin, or made to stumble and fall into any breach of Duty either towards God or to-
wards

wards Men: for so the original Word *Ἀνεγκοντισ*, which we here translate *void of Offence*, is known to signifie. Thus when a Man's Conscience draws him back, and will not suffer him to do such or such a particular Action which is in it self sinful, and positively forbidden by some known and reveal'd Law of God; or when on the other hand it prompts him to, and encourageth him in the performance of any thing that is pleasing and acceptable to the Divine Will; then may that Man's Conscience be truly and properly called a *Good and Inoffensive Conscience*, viz. because it directs him to the Performance of his Duty, and makes him to go in the Path in which he is commanded to walk; and wherein so long as he continues, his *Footsteps slide not*, and he hath *no occasion of Stumbling* thrown in his way.

So that in effect, a *Good and Inoffensive Conscience* signifies no more in this respect than a regular and uniform performance of our Duty; and he who hath it is none else but the very Man, whom in other Language we sometimes call an upright and obedient Christian.

But here I would not be misunderstood to say that these Expressions are convertible; so as that no Man can be a good Christian, but he only who at all Times, and in all the Circumstances of his Life, is guided by an *Unerring and Inoffensive Conscience*. For although this be always true in Matters of

known and general Precept ; yet in some particular cases of invincible Ignorance it may often happen otherwise : As, when either the Law it self is obscurely revealed to him ; or, when he wants Ability and Opportunity to understand it ; or when although he doth understand the Law it self, yet some intervening Circumstances may possibly so disguise the tendency of his present Action, as that he cannot well discern whether it falls under the force and obligation of that Law, &c. For in these and the like Circumstances of Invincible Ignorance, 'tis generally allowed that a Mans Conscience may misguide him, and yet he nevertheless continue the Character of an honest and sincere (I may add too) conscientious Christian. Upon this account it is, that our Charity obligeth us to make some Allowances for the power, and force and prejudice of Education ; under which Disadvantages it may possibly so happen, that a Man may be misinformed concerning the nature of his Duty, and yet be very excusable at the same time ; forasmuch as it was not perhaps so much his own fault, as either the Craft or Ignorance of his Teachers, that he was not better instructed in it : And if for this reason, we are willing to suppose, that some of the poor ignorant deluded Members of an Idolatrous Church, and that some of the honest well-meaning Dissenters from that Ecclesiastical Establishment to which we belong, may yet be in a state of Salvation, although

although it be more in truth than what we are generally thank'd for, yet it is no more than what in common Sense, as well as common Charity, we ought to allow.

For although what I said before be true, That the Laws and Precepts of the Gospel are the fix'd and standing Rule of the Christian's Duty and Obedience; yet these can be no farther a Rule to him than as they are known and understood: For how can he perform that as matter of Duty, which he doth not first apprehend to be so? or how is it possible for him to obey those Laws which he hath no manner of Knowledge of? No, he must first judge and deliberate with himself what it is which the Law requireth, before he can act with any Intention of observing it: And whether he judgeth right or wrong in this case, all that is left for him to do is, to act according to his best Judgment herein.

The chief Difficulty therefore in this Point will lye in stating the case of Invincible Ignorance, and in shewing the several Conditions which are required to make it so denominated. In order to which, it would be requisite to examine into the several Causes from whence such Ignorance may proceed; whether from the obscurity of the Law it self, or from its indirect force and obligation as to such or such a particular Action; whether from the Fallibility of the means of Knowledge, or from the natural Weakness

ness of the Understanding; or, from the want of Opportunity, and other helps of Instruction, &c. But all this would require a much larger scope than can be here allowed it; and therefore I shall here content my self to say in the general, That in what case soever a Man's Ignorance is purely and innocently involuntary, *i. e.* if after an honest Industry and diligent Application to the best means and opportunities of Knowledge he can well have, his Conscience doth nevertheless err, and misguide him into the Transgression of any Law; yet this Transgression shall never be imputed to him as mortal and damning, forasmuch as it was not any way chosen by him, either in it self, or in its Cause. It is indeed his Unhappiness and his ill Fortune to have been mistaken, nay, and 'tis his *Sin* too, so far forth as it hath misled him into the *Transgression of the Law*: yet such a Sin it is, as will be pardonable amongst his other unavoidable Infirmities upon a general Repentance; not such as will be brought against him as any express Article of his Condemnation; because where there is no Choice, there will be no Condemnation; and in the case supposed, he cannot be said to chuse the Sin, because he did not know that the Action was sinful; nor did he chuse not to know it, because he could not help it.

But I shall here dismiss the farther Consideration of this Case, and proceed to shew you in the next place,

place, what is meant by a *Good and Inoffensive Conscience*, as it relates to our past Actions, and is considered as a Witness to testify concerning them.

The Answer to which Enquiry is very plain and obvious; this being in truth nothing else but that Testimony which ariseth from the consideration of any innocent and well-meant Action; which whilst the Conscience surveys and examines as already past, it cannot accuse it of any Enormity, nor bring any evidence of Guilt against it; but on the contrary, reflects upon it as well done, and in a just Conformity to that Law by which it was to be directed. A *Good and Inoffensive Conscience* is in this respect therefore nothing else but a consequence of the former, and results from it, as naturally, as the Effect from its Cause: For after that the good Christian hath been diligent and sincere in the Performance of his Duty, and hath heartily endeavoured (so far as the frailty of his Nature would permit him) to live up to all the several Obligations of it both toward God and toward his Neighbour; he cannot but with great Joy and Complacency reflect upon his past Actions, and please himself with the remembrance of those Duties which (how difficult and irksome soever they were in their present Performance) do now administer the most solid Comfort and Delight to him imaginable.

This *Good Conscience* holy David had, who, whilst he called his past Ways to remembrance, was able
to

to witness for himself, that *his Heart had not inclined to any Evil*; but that *he had stuck unto the Testimonies of the Lord, and loved them exceedingly*. This was holy Job's Comfort and Relief amidst all the Miseries and Afflictions that beset him, who could say in the joy of his Heart, that he had *kept the way of his God, and had not gone back from the Commandment of his Lips* in any one instance of his Duty. And this is the Consolation of every upright and sincere Christian, who after having tryed and examined his past Life according to that Rule which was given him to Walk by, finds no wilful Disobedience to accuse it of, no clamorous Guilt of any one wilful unrepented Sin, to grieve and disquiet him in his peaceful and humble Reflections upon it.

But here it is carefully to be remembred, that the Examination of our past Life, from whence this Testimony of a good Conscience doth proceed, must be very strictly and impartially taken, and according to the most rigorous and extensive Obligation of our Christian Duty; because it is otherwise possible for a Man to cheat and flatter himself into the Opinion of a Good Conscience, and to say unto his Soul *Peace, Peace*, where indeed no Peace ought to be had: And this often happens in the case of some one or other over-powerful and darling Passion; through the habitual Force and Prejudice of which, a Man's Reason and Judgment may possibly be so byass'd and controul'd, that when he comes to examine his past
Life

Life, he either wholly over-looks that Action which was misguided by it, or else glosseth so favourably upon the Law whereby it was forbidden, that he thence easily cheats and flatters himself into a false Opinion of its Innocence.

Thus for Instance, A Man whose Mind is too eagerly set upon the Encrease of his Wealth (either in the Way of Trade or otherwise) is not always conscious to himself of that Guilt which he hath contracted by it; but can, as he thinks, with a good Conscience reflect upon all those gainful Arts and Practises which he hath used in it, and which were really and in themselves dishonest and unjust.: The Reason of which is not perhaps, because this Man does not think Dishonesty a Sin; but because rather he does not look upon his Actions to have been dishonest. For such a Man as this is generally guided by Principles of his own forming; and he first lays down to himself his own particular Scheme of Justice and Honesty, which so long as he hath lived and acted by, he thinks himself in the mean time a very good Christian; and enjoys the Peace and Quiet of his Conscience as securely as the more just and righteous Person. In this therefore, and other the like Cases, we must learn to distinguish betwixt a *Quiet* and a *Good*, a *Peaceful* and a *Pure Conscience*: for although both these may possibly administer some present Comfort and Satisfaction to the Soul; yet 'tis the latter of these only which is that *Good and Inoffensive*

D

Inoffensive Conscience whose Character I have thus far endeavour'd to describe.

Would you therefore, upon the whole, be satisfied what is meant by a *Good and Inoffensive Conscience*? Would you know the Man who can truly and properly be said to have it? By this Character you shall know him;

He is one, who in the first place hath been diligent and industrious to know and understand his Duty; and according to his best Knowledge thereof, hath been afterwards sincere and hearty in the performance of it, both toward God and toward Men. He is one, who hath not been prejudiced by any Worldly Interest or Advantage, nor misguided through the Predominancy of any other prevailing Lust or Passion: but has carefully endeavoured to pay an impartial and entire Obedience of all his voluntary and chosen Actions to the whole Will of God; so far at least as it hath been revealed to him, and he was capable of understanding it. He is one who is not conscious to himself of any one wilful unrepented Sin; but as it hath been his chiefest care not to offend wilfully at all, so when through the Weakness of Nature or the Power of Temptation he hath so offended, he hath nevertheless speedily disburdened his Soul of the Guilt of that Sin, by a hearty and sincere Repentance. In short, He is one, who after the most strict and severe Examination of all his past Thoughts, Words and Actions,

ons, can say in the Integrity of his Soul, That he has sincerely and conscientiously performed the Duty of a good Christian according to all those Terms and Conditions of Evangelical Faith and Repentance which are required of him in the Gospel. This, this is the only good Conscientious Christian, this the Happy Man whom we at first proposed to enquire after. Let us now see wherein his Happiness doth consist: And this will appear by reflecting a little in the next Place,

2. Upon that Happiness and Satisfaction which ariseth from the Testimony of a Good Conscience.

'Tis the Remark of a great and learned Man, That amongst the many Motives and Obligations which we lye under for the Performance of our Christian Duty, there is nothing which doth more sensibly recommend it to our Choice and Approbation, than that intrinsick Peace and Satisfaction wherewith it is accompanied. Upon which account we can never sufficiently adore the Infinity, both of the Wisdom and Goodness of our Supreme Lawgiver; who hath so admirably contrived to make our Duty become our Happiness; and hath more than recompensed for all the supposed Rigour and Severity of his Laws, by that consequent Delight and Complacency of Mind which ariseth from the Observance of them. From hence it is, that the good Conscientious Christian is the most secure and happy Man whilst he lives, and enjoys the most true and solid comfort

when he comes to dye. That inward Peace and Satisfaction of Soul which ariseth from the Consideration of his having done his Duty, and of his having thereby purchased to himself the Peace and Favour of God, advancing his Happiness above all the possible Contingencies of any Trouble or Disquiet in this World; above the Fear of any Torment or Misery in the next. For this reason he is always calm and undisturb'd, quiet and compos'd amidst all the various Assaults of Fortune: No Pain or Affliction of Body can molest him; no Loss of Friends, or Liberty, or Estate, nor any other Disappointment whatsoever, can discomfit him: For so long as he still retains his Integrity, and supports himself under the Testimony of a *Good and Inoffensive Conscience*, he will not fear what Man can do unto him; no, nor what the Devil himself, and all the enraged Powers of Hell, can be ever able to Plot or Design against him.

We need go no farther than the Text, for an Instance to illustrate this Character; where we find the Apostle *St. Paul* standing before the Judgment-Seat at *Cæsarea*, persecuted and expos'd to the dangerous hazard of a most malicious and unjust Accusation. The Witnesses against him were in all probability some of those Blood-thirsty Villains, who in the Chapter before had solemnly *bound themselves with an Oath to kill him*: and what they there failed of by Treachery and Assassination, they were now
pre-

prepared to effect, by a wicked and perjurious Process. The Judge before whom he was to plead his Cause, was already prejudiced on his Accusers side, through the flattering Insinuations of that mercenary *Orator* whom they had feed'd and brought along with them, on purpose to aggravate his Crimes; and to render their Malice against him (if it were possible) yet more malicious. What now could be expected from so dreadful and amazing a Prospect, but certain Ruin and Destruction? for in all outward Appearance he had no Friend to stand by him, and to support him under the Difficulties of his Tryal; no Witness allowed to testify his Innocence; no, nor the common Equity of a Judge to rely upon. Yes, but he had; he had all these; for God was his Judge, his own Conscience was his Witness, and the Testimony of that was his Support. From hence it was, that we find him so confident and assured in the Defence of his Cause; so constant and unmoved amidst all that Artillery of Malice and Revenge that was planted against him; and that he then stood bold and undaunted at the Bar, when at the same time his unrighteous guilty Judge sat trembling upon the Bench. It was this Testimony of a *Good and Inoffensive Conscience*, which guarded and secured him under all the Difficulties and Pressures of his Christian Warfare. By this he contemn'd all the vain Assaults of *Tribulation*, and *Distress*, and *Persecution*, and *Famine*, and *Nakedness*, and the *Sword*: by this he challenged

challenged all the Force of Men and Devils, of *Angels, and Principalities, and Powers*, and of all the Supercoelestial Host; nay, and as he yet farther adds, (and that very emphatically, *Rom. 8. 39.*) *or of any other Creature*: For as if he had been already confident, that neither the Strength, nor Power, nor Glory of any thing that was yet created, could be able to shock his Integrity; he seems in these last Words to raise the Challenge yet higher, and like the *Daring Macedon*, to require a new Enemy to exercise his Courage upon. So great is the Security of a *Good and Inoffensive Conscience*! so powerful the Defence of a pure and upright Mind! than which nothing can make a Man more truly happy in this World; and besides which, nothing can better secure to him the Hopes and Expectation of a blessed Immortality in that which is to come.

But then if we pursue the Character of the good conscientious Christian, and visit him upon his Death-bed, we shall there find him the same happy Man still: For the same *Good and Inoffensive Conscience* which gave him Ease and Consolation, Patience and Constancy amidst all the Afflictions and Tribulations of his Life, will likewise strengthen and support, comfort, and succour, and defend him under the Pains and Agonies of his Death. It is now, that with Pleasure he remembers his former Life, and forgets the Pangs and dolorous Approaches of his Death, whilst his Thoughts are wholly taken up
and

and employ'd in the grateful Reflections of his past Obedience. For this Reason he is perhaps the only glad and joyful Person in the sick Chamber; for that whilst his sorrowful and lamenting Friends stand weeping round him, and mourn over his Bed to see the time of his Dissolution draw so near; he in the mean time finds his Pillow soft and easie under him; his Mind quiet and compos'd; and all the Faculties of his Soul gratefully employ'd in Raptures and Extasies of Joy and Gladness. Till at length tir'd out, and overpower'd by the strength and malignity of his Disease, he lies down calmly and in Innocence, and quietly resigns up his Soul into the Hands of God that gave it, as into the Hands of a faithful Creator and most merciful Saviour. *Happy is the Man that is in such a Case; yea Blessed is He who thus lives the Life, who thus dies the Death of the Righteous.*

And now having thus shewn you what is meant by a *Good and Inoffensive Conscience*; and given you an Idea (tho but imperfectly and in part only) of that Happiness and Satisfaction which ariseth from the Testimony of it. It remains in the last place,

3. That I briefly exhort you to endeavour after it. But here 'tis to be hoped, that what hath been already said will be sufficient for this purpose: For, need any Man be exhorted to purchase to himself the Security of a Good Conscience, after having understood the inestimable Price and Value of it? Need he be perswaded to that which will be his greatest Ease and Satisfaction, his most solid Comfort and Delight?

Indeed

Indeed were those unconceivable Joys and Pleasures which are the promised Inheritance of the Saints in Heaven the only Motives of the Christians Duty and Obedience, he might then seem to want the Assistance of Rhetorick and Perswasion to have these Motives inculcated into him; and that because these are future only and at a distance; the Objects properly of his Fancy and Imagination; and such therefore as ought to be presentiated to his Soul by the Force and Mediation of Reason and Argument. But certainly there can be no want of Rhetorick to perswade a Man to the Enjoyment of sensible Pleasures and Delights; no great need of Oratory to convince him of the Reasonableness of making his Condition comfortable and easie in this Life.

And yet this is all that I am to exhort you to, 'tis only to be calm and undisturb'd under all the various Vicissitudes of Fortune; to laugh at and despise all those Crafts and Assaults which the Devil or Man are at any time working against you; and in the midst of all their most subtle and mischievous Imaginations, to be free from Trouble, and secure from Danger; to be joyful in times of Adversity; chearful in Tribulation; never to fear any Evil, never to suffer any. In short, it is only to live happily, and to dye comfortably: or, if you will have it in other Words, which yet in effect signifie the same thing, it is so to exercise and behave your selves, as to have *always a Conscience void of Offence both toward God and toward Men.*

F I N I S.



